

# Books of The Times

By CHARLES POORE

NOT long after the last of the old-fashioned World Wars ended, Demaree Bess, a suave chronicler of carnage, asked Walter Bedell Smith to present his view of how it had been planned and fought and won. No doubt General Smith asked Mr. Bess for a staff study of what he had in mind, but that does not appear in the record. However, in the course of a later luncheon Sir Winston Churchill overcame the Smithian reluctance by pointing out that pretty soon everybody was going to get into the act, anyway, and there would be value in a narrative showing America's and Britain's ability to work together in the blaze and havoc of war. As Chief of Staff at SHAEF, General Smith was in a good strategic position to do that. He had seen American soldiers grow so British that they thought of the sidings around railway depots as marshaling yards and British soldiers so American that they almost learned to like PX peanut butter.

Therefore, with the help of Stewart Beach and the mountainous records of a headquarters whose primary weapon was the mimeograph machine, Mark 1, he produced for The Saturday Evening Post a series called "Eisenhower's Six Great Decisions: Europe, 1944-45,"\* which, with additional material, gives a wonderfully clear panorama of days of wrath.

## Eisenhower's Pivotal Moments

What were the half dozen pivotal moments? They were, as General Smith chooses them, the decision to go full speed ahead with D-Day twelve years ago yesterday, in spite of foul Channel weather; the decision to snare the Hitler forces in Normandy and chop them up then and there; the decision to split General Bradley's command during the Battle of the Bulge (though this is not put so bluntly); the decision to chop up more Nazi forces west of the Rhine; the double envelopment of the Ruhr, and the decision to send our forces fanning over Germany to destroy what was left of Hitler's waning power to fight on anywhere, including a huge mountain-fastness last stand in that spectral and now almost forgotten National Redoubt.

Other experts would make other choices of crucial decisions, of course. They might suggest, for example, that carrying out the Mediterranean invasion of France in spite of Churchillian opposition was one. And overruling Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory's eloquent misgivings about the air drop on D-Day might be another. Not to mention the continuing problem of dealing with a notion, popular in England, that Field Marshal Montgomery should by almost divine right have permanent charge of the Allied ground forces, which was always rearing its black-bereted head. And, decidedly, the decision not to ride hell for leather to beat the Bolsheviks to Berlin.

These and further popular topics of declamation and recrimination do not escape the Beedie's eye. He notes, for example, that capturing Berlin was always an appealing prospect in the Allied plans, even though it would



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General Smith, right, at the signing of the German surrender on May 7, 1945.

of Germany. Long before D-Day, in fact, Allied officers planning away in the London fog around Norfolk House (site of the birthplace of George III) mentally measured themselves for parachutes that would waft them right down to the main entrance of the fatuous Fuehrer's chancellery. In the spring of 1945, however, the Russians, having abandoned the people of Warsaw to slaughter, got themselves to Berlin while we were still pushing our way through surrendering hordes of a regime intended, but not quite built, to last for a thousand years.

## On How Hitler Lost the War

Another new book on our table, "The Fatal Decisions,"† offers a fascinating sheaf of explanations made by captured German generals on just how and why and where Hitler lost the war. Here General of the Air Force Werner Kreipe discusses the Battle of Britain, Gen. Gunther Blumentritt sounds off on the Battle of Moscow, Lieut. Gen. Fritz Bayerlein holds a post-mortem on Alamein, Col. Gen. Kurt Zeitzler takes the Battle of Stalingrad, Lieut. Gen. Bodo Zimmermann the 1944 Battle of France, and Gen. Hasso von Manteuffel the Battle of the Ardennes.

Ironically enough, what is most interesting at this moment in history is the way some of the German commentaries disagree with those recently uttered by the foremost post-mortician of our time, Nikita S. Khrushchev. Thus Gen. Siegfried Westphal says that although Stalin was taken tactically by surprise, "he was, of course, aware of the massing of German divisions beyond his western frontier; he suspected what was afoot and strengthened his own forces accordingly." In Khrushchev's retroactive purge of Stalin, however, the thought is advanced that the elder murderer's forces were atrociously unprepared. Think of old chums of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact days disagreeing on such a question.

\*EISENHOWER'S SIX GREAT DECISIONS: EUROPE, 1944-45. By Walter Bedell Smith. 237 pages. Longmans, Green. \$3.95. eventually be within the agreed Russian sector

†THE FATAL DECISIONS. Edited by Seymour Freidin and William Richardson. Foreword by S. L. A. Marshall. Commentary by Lieut. Gen. Siegfried Westphal. 302 pages. William Sloane Associates. 24.